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The SPIDERS
and
OTHER POEMS.



Hilton R. Greer.

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BY
HILTON R. GREER

THE SPIDERS AND OTHER POEMS

To the Memory of My Mother

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THE SPIDERS.

THE SPIDERS.

CLOSE by Life's gardenside,
Silently, ceaselessly,
Tangling the hearts of men
Deep in its meshes,
Spinneth a spider.

Silently, ceaselessly,
Weaving a web that is
Fashioned of filminess,
Sun-gleams and gossamers
Dew-pearled and odorous;
Weaving a web that is
Frailer than mist at times,
Steel-strong at others,
Tangling the hearts of men
Ever and hopelessly
In its soft thonging,
Spinneth the blithe-footed
Spider of Love!

Close by Life's gardenside,
Swiftly, relentlessly,

THE SPIDER.

Stifling the hearts of men
In its thick meshes,
Spinneth a spider.

Silently, ceaselessly,
Swiftly, relentlessly,
Weaving a web that is
Dull-hued and lusterless ;
Weaving a web so dense
Yet so impalpable,
Soft and insidious,
None may escape it—
Spinneth the thousand-eyed,
Eager, implacable,
Gray, gaunt, and terrible
Spider of Death !

DUST OF STARS.

MEN are but clods incarnate, we are told ;
 Frail creatures, fashioned of a common clay.
But soul-filled soil which, to the mother-mold
 From whence it sprung, one day returneth. Nay,

Fashioned of dust are we, but dust of stars !
 Why else this beating of wild spirit-wings,
Striving to break earth's sordid prison bars
 And soar, sod-spurning, unto astral things ?

TO ANY SCOFFER.

Out on you, babbler! You, and all your breed
Who dare assail the potency of rhyme!
Saying the bard's best songs but go to feed
The insatiate hunger of the tapeworm, Time!

Know'st not, O fool, Time woke with song? That life
Itself is one long epic, years on years,
Pulsing with martial measures, stir of strife,
And changing cadences of smiles and tears?

Know'st not that spirit which, from David's lyre
Outbreathed, drove demons from the breast of Saul,
Has in it something of a living fire
Which shall endure no little while, but all?

Yea, not for now, nor unborn years alone;
But when Earth's little peoples cease to be,
The soul of Song shall echo round God's throne
Through endless eons of eternity!

MEMORY.

SHRINED in the inmost chamber of the heart
There is a vase of sheer and beaten gold,
A fragile thing and exquisite, wherein
The fairest flowers of departed Junes
Are kept perennial—the slender vase
Which men call Memory!

A VILLAGE STREET.

WHERE swaying branches lace and meet
In canopies of green
Above an old-time village street,
Quiet and cool and clean,
The mellow sunbeams filter slow
And, interwrought with shade,
Trace on the velvet sward below
A shimmering brocade.

No sound disturbs the holy hush
That wraps the silent street
Save when at times some trill of thrush
Drifts tremulously sweet;
Or else, when purple twilight flings
A gauzy veil and thin,
Wake echoes from the tinkling strings
Of mellow mandolin.

This is the street, serene and sweet,
Down which in days ago
I tripped with bare and buoyant feet
Through dews of dusk and dawn;

A VILLAGE STREET.

Or romped at play with comrades gay
While some long afternoon
Droned slowly, drowsily away
Like bees in fields of June.

Old quiet street! the steps that learn
The city's crowded ways
Once more and eagerly will turn
To scenes of other days,
And, sick of ceaseless fray and fret,
Cacophonous and rude,
Will seek, while eyes grow dim and wet,
Thy restful quietude!

THE GIFT.

ONE gift he claimed as his and, miser-souled,
Kept it close-prisoned, lest on sudden wing
It seek some day a keeper new, and leave
His life all gleaned of joy and colorless;
But looking in one morn, solicitous,
Viewed, horror-eyed, a puny, shriveled thing,
Void of all grace and strength and loveliness.

Wide-flinging then the door that prisoned it,
He bade it seek the outer, ampler airs,
The stretching world ways, teeming haunts of men!
But ere the day had waned, it came again,
Back to the selfsame door that prisoned it,
And he who waited, leaping, flung it wide
With eager, trembling fingers—and beheld,
Not the one hoarded gift, but ten instead!

AFTER MUCH WANDERING.

SOME day when you're tired of the toiling,
And sick of the stress and the strain,
When you've mingled Life's rue with its hyssop,
And eaten the fruit with the husk,
You will follow the footprints of Fancy
Down some old-fashioned garden again.
Where the hollyhocks flame and the roses
Gleam white on the breast of the dusk!

And you'll think on the years that were wasted
For the place that you purchased with peace,
Of how hollow a bauble is glory—
How fleeting the guerdons you gain;
And your eyes will grow blind with the blurring
Of sorrow that knows not surcease,
Some day when you're tired of the toiling,
And sick of the stress and the strain.

For the world may be yours for the winning,
And the prospect stretch broad to the view,
But the fruit that shone fair in the distance
Seems shrunken when grasped in the husk,
And your spirit, God knows, will be weary,
And you'll long for the peace that you knew
Where the hollyhocks flame and the roses
Gleam white on the breast of the dusk!

STANTON.

WHEN Stanton, up in Georgia, tunes his magic lyre
and sings,
The very air grows murmurous with rhythmic riot-
ings!
The lisp of leaves and scent of sheaves blend in his
song's refrain,
The hum of bees in locust trees and meadows drenched
with rain;
Beneath his spell Life's pathway lies through sunlit
fields of June,
Where Time trips lightly onward to a banjo's tinkling
tune,
And sluggish aims grow stronger, and newborn hopes
upstart,
And burst to bud and blossom in the gardens of the
heart!

O Stanton, up in Georgia! O singer, strong and true!
Here's one in Texas drains a bowl in hearty health to
you!
Long may you live to bless us and drive our woes
away
With songs that breathe the redolence and riotry of
May!

SHORE LIGHTS.

As one, adrift on some tempestuous deep,
Of friendly port or favoring gale denied,
Where black night rules, nor star-gleams wake to
guide,

And wind and wave demoniac revel keep;
As such an one might gladly note the sweep
Of beacon light athwart the tossing tide
And feel within the doubt gates sundered wide,
And joy unpent through all the pulses leap—

So oftentimes on Life's uncertain main,
When, tempest-lashed and wrapt in rayless night,
With warring winds and hostile waves we cope,
And, struggling, sink—and, sinking, strive again—
There burst like beacons on our dazzled sight
The lights that mark the smiling shores of Hope!

SEEDTIME.

HASTE ye, my soul, for the sowing
Deep in the garden of years;
Truths that may grant ye in growing
Meed for the toil and the tears.

Long have the furrows lain fallow,
Waiting the husbandman's share;
Haste to thy task, while ye hallow
All of the plodding with prayer.

Haste ye, my soul; on the morrow
Season and sun may be past.
Haste ye, lest sighing and sorrow
Strangle the seed that ye cast.

Haste, while the green ways are glowing;
Off with vain doubtings and fears.
Haste ye, my soul, for the sowing
Deep in the garden of years.

AT HARVEST.

WHEN comes Life's autumn time—as come it must,
Some not far-distant day, to you and me—
What shall we tell the Landlord of our trust,
What shall we yield Him of our husbandry?

Shall we bring ruddy vintage, stores of corn,
Rich golden harvests from the yester-lands,
Or shriveled sheaves, inmixed with tare and thorn,
Or greet him, sadder still, with empty hands?

Ah me! when comes Life's autumn—as it must,
Some not far-distant day, to you and me—
What shall we tell the Landlord of our trust,
What shall we yield Him of our husbandry?

AFTER STORM.

As some frail reed, that through a night of storms
 A stricken suppliant lies,
Helpless, submissive, spent with vain alarms,
Yet quickened, strengthened, robed in fresher green,
Lifts to the wind beneath the blue serene
 Of cloudless morning skies—

So souls that, stricken in the gloom of grief,
 Bow to the storm-swept sod.
Chastened and cleansed and clothed in newer leaf
Of hope and trust and all-abiding strength,
From the low earth may lift themselves at length
 In the clear light of God!

THE TRUEST THANKFULNESS.

NOR song, nor speech, may fittingly express
The soul's deep thankfulness ;
There is a gratitude which stands confessed
In lips slow-trembling, and in heaving breast,
Which speaks, up-welling in the unbidden tear ;
It is the most sincere !

AT THE STABLE DOOR.

AWED by seraphic strains
That stir and thrill the still Judean plains,
Lured by the luster of a strange, new star.
From alien lands and far—

To this low stable door
Throng simple peasants, wizards learned in lore;
Rich gifts of frankincense and myrrh they bring
To aid their worshiping.

For one rapt moment's space
Their glances sweep the shining stable place,
Note the low rafters and the littered stall,
Then, dazed and blinded, fall;

For, waking on their sight,
Has burst a vision of celestial light
Where lies, encradled in a manger dim,
The Babe of Bethlehem!

A moment's space, then each
Is bowed in homage far too deep for speech.
The homage, hollow words may not express,
Of speaking silentness.

AT THE STABLE DOOR.

Little you dream or know,
Shepherd and sage in worship bended low,
What paths of pain these baby feet must tread,
What crowns must deck its head!

Not yours to pierce the rift
Of years where grim Golgotha's crosses lift,
To know this Babe of Bethlehem must be
The Christ of Calvary!

TO A LITTLE CHILD.

COULD I but go before a little way
Along the road your tender feet must fare,
And put aside the bramble and the tare
That wait to wound you on a later day :
Mark the low paths that, luring, lead astray
With sight made clear long since in sterner air,
Point out the pitfall and the hidden snare
That lurk to bring you sorrow and dismay :

Could I but go a little way before—
Untutored child heart ! Trusting innocence !—
How gladly would I suffer for your sake
Old wounds reopened to the keen, quick core !
All-pitying God ! that such soft feet should take
The long, hard highway of Experience !

QUATRAINS.

CONES.

THE tree of Time a pine is, green and tall,
Where to, like clustered cones, we cling and cleave
Our little season. Ah, God grant we leave
Some after-breath of fragrance when we fall!

AT DUSK.

O'ER-RIPENED Day falls from its fading husk;
And look! where Sunset loosed her rosy bars,
Deep in the purple pastures of the dusk
A wan moon-shepherd leads the straggling stars!

LOST.

ACROSS the hot Sahara of the sky
Long caravans of cloud, slow-winding, crawl;
Wild Bedouin winds sweep down with sudden cry,
And the deep desert blueness swallows all!

CHALLENGED.

PRAY, spend thy scorn, old Time, and wreak thy wrath!
Why should I reckon though Fame and Fortune flee,
If the blithe beggar, Love, along Life's path
But choose to comrade me?

QUATRAINS.

CANDELABRA.

To the hushed house of dead Midsummer, lo!
Sandaled with silentness, October comes
And sets each dusk-dim corridor aglow
With candelabra of chrysanthemums!

ANTLIKE.

MAN's but a little ant, say you, that crawls
Down Time's hot, tortuous highway? Yea, in sooth!
But not for naught if, haply, he but bear
Some fallow field one golden grain of truth!

THE TRUMPETER.

BLARING with bronzed lips till aisle and arch
Of wood and sky with sounding echoes stir—
Hark where, hard-galloping, rides trooper March,
The young year's trumpeter!

APRIL.

AND now comes April, fair and fickle maiden,
Fit prototype of Life's vain hopes and fears:
One moment bowed in grief and sorrow-laden,
The next one smiling bravely through her tears!

FORGETFULNESS.

I PLUNGED me deep within a solitude
Of gloomy wood,
Where I might rid me of the wild unrest
That clamored in my breast.

But ever keen remembrance followed me
Relentlessly,
And all the lisp of leaves and south wind's strain
Seemed but to mock my pain.

So, quick I turned, and sought with hasting feet
The surging street,
And there amid the unceasing strife and stress
I found forgetfulness.

OUT OF THE DUSK.

OUT of the dusk—a song,
A mellow cadence, touched with tenderness,
And sweet with solace as the soft caress
Of mother lips that bowed them but to bless
In twilights vanished long.

Out of the dusk—a song,
A mist of melody more silver-sweet
Than rune of rain in popped fields of wheat
To one who, loitering with slow-lagging feet,
Halts in the surging throng.

Out of the dusk—a song,
Wafted from unseen lips, a breath of peace
That brings the dim-eyed dallier release
From thonging sorrows and a sweet surcease
Of wrath and woe and wrong.

A SMILE AND A SONG.

GIVE to the world a smile. There is enough,
God knows, of sullen scowls and churlishness!
What if thy footsteps fare through highways rough—
Can futile frowning make thy burdens less?
Nay, though thy secret soul be sad the while,
Give to the world a smile!

Give to the world a song. The very air
Seems charged with keen complainings and with
sighs
That are but echoings of dark despair.
What if a surly sun forsake the skies,
Or if thy pilgrimage be overlong?
Give to the world a song!

THEN AND NOW.

THE olden days
Were the golden days—
Aye, they were fair, I know—
But the present days
May be pleasant days
If only we make them so.

If the heart be light,
All the days are bright
As skies in the blossomy May;
If the soul be rent
With a discontent,
Why, all of the days are gray.

A smile and a song
As we journey along
May brighten the way a bit,
For the world is a stream
That will gloom or gleam
In turn as we look at it.

Aye, the olden days
Were the golden days,
Freighted with joys, I know;
But the present days
May be pleasant days
If only we make them so.

THE BUBBLE CHASER.

To her side one day the mild-eyed Mother
Called her Best Beloved, and for his joyance
Blew from out a slender reed a bubble
Like a sphere of sheer, pellucid silver,
Shining with the seven hues of heaven,
Miracles of color—rose of morning,
Tawny tints of noonday, twilight purples,
Emerald glintings like the summer sea's breast.

And the Best Beloved, with eyes enchanted,
Watched the radiant sphere go floating from him;
Then with lips disparted, childlike, eager,
Started forth on flying feet to follow:

Far and far the burnished bubble lured him;
Onward still, and onward, ever onward,
Near at times, yet, phantomlike, eluding
Trembling, straining hands upraised to grasp it;
Onward still, and onward, till its luster,
Blending with the bending heaven's blueness,
Vanished from the range of yearning vision.

THE BUBBLE CHASER.

So, with eyes grown pitiful with sorrow,
And with feet outwearied from pursuing,
Turned he then and sought the mild-eyed Mother,
Who, with heart made tender by compassion,
Loving arms outstretched, and to her bosom
Strained the weeping child and gently told him:
"Know, my Best Beloved, this shining bubble
Which afar on flying feet you followed
Countless others have pursued before you.
Sometimes touching, never all-possessing:
Keats and Poe and Shelley, all my children,
Chased such silver bubbles and, despairing,
Knew the glory of immortal longing!
'Tis the spirit of elusive Beauty,
Real in seeming, but as evanescent
As the rose tint in the clouds of sunset!"

WHO DWELLS WITH NATURE.

WHO DWELLS WITH NATURE.

Who dwells with Nature, clasps her hand
In cordial comradery,
Her best bestowals may command ;
No niggard hostess she.

With lavish grace she offers up
All wholesome gifts and good ;
She bids him drain her sparkling cup
And share her daily food.

A roof of blue she arches o'er
As shelter for his head ;
Spreads for his feet a fragrant floor
With pine cones carpeted.

She drapes his couch in curtains cool,
Of sheer and lacey mist ;
A mirror makes of some still pool
By shifting shadows kissed.

She wakes wild melody in sounds
Of silver-singing rills ;
The hoarse-mouthed bay of distant hounds
At dawn among the hills.

WHO DWELLS WITH NATURE.

Wielding a magic brush, she spreads
Rare pictures for his eyes,
And dazzles with warm golds and reds
Of Autumn tapestries.

She opens wide her book of days,
A classic clasped with gold ;
Creation's moving tale displays,
And legends weird and old.

She leads him to some cloistered shrine,
Shut in from sordid gaze,
Where deep-toned organs of the pine
Chant solemn hymns of praise.

And as he bows in worship there,
She sets his spirit free
From sordid care, and bids him share
Her sweet tranquillity.

CONQUEST.

SPRING and Winter met one day
Near the huddled hills—
Scant his locks as lichens gray ;
Spring's, like daffodils.
They were known as open foes
Over all the earth.
Spring detested ice and snows ;
Winter, blooms and mirth.

Long his tense and tyrant clutch
Prisoned fen and field,
Long the streams to bar his touch
Raised an icy shield ;
Spring, to break their fetters free,
Summoned all her charms,
All her wondrous witchery
To take the King of Storms.

"May I pass, kind sir?" she said,
Beaming, blossom-wise,
Up at him with lips of red,
Eyes of April skies ;
Winter wavered, loath to go,
Smiled and stepped aside,
Bowed his head and, bending low,
"Certainly!" he cried.

AN APRIL LYRIC.

BURST of bud and miracle,
Of snowy orchard blooming;
Lures of laughter lyrical,
Flung from tinkling rills;
Stir and swish of swallow wing
And purple lilacs pluming;
Wake, my soul, for following—
'Tis April on the hills!

INTER-PINES.

FAR from the fevered fret of trade and town,
Far from the noontide's pulsing hum and heat,
Past stream and stile, up shaly slope and down,
 A dim path winds
 And, winding, finds
Deep in the pines a cloistering retreat
Where ripened cones and needles crisp and brown
Outspread a fragrant carpet for the feet.

Like ancient monks, uplifting priestly arms
High overhead in blessings murmured low,
The pine trees stand; and all life's vain alarms,
 Its wild unrest
 Of brain and breast,
Speed swift as blooms when winds of Autumn blow,
And in their stead, as silence after storms,
Glides gentle Peace with noiseless tread and slow.

The cravings keen for all the vain may vaunt,
The tense desires for worldly power and place,
Find sweet surcease within this holy haunt
 Where, spreading wings
 From sordid things,
The soul mounts upward for a fleeting space,
While winds and pines lift grand cathedral chaunt,
And meets its God and Maker face to face.

THE HILLS OF JUNE.

Cry truce in the struggle for place and gain,
With its stress and its din and glare!
And it's off with the pangs of a nameless pain,
And the gyves of a dull despair,
And it's out for a day in the ampler air
To the lilt of a lightsome tune;
O, it's hey and away from the house of Care,
And it's ho for the hills of June!

When the ways rang shrill with the wild refrain
Of the North wind's trumpet blare,
It were well to house from the roar and rain
And the joys of the field forswear;
But now when the sun spreads a golden snare,
And the dawn flings a balsamed boon—
O, its hey and away from the house of Care,
And it's ho for the hills of June!

For a breath of balm for the breast and brain,
Let the buoyant footstep fare,
Through the meadows wide and the spangled
plain,
By the song-sweet hedge to where

THE HILLS OF JUNE.

A dim path winds like a spiral stair
Up, up, where the dark pines croon ;
O, it's hey and away from the house of Care,
And it's ho for the hills of June !

Envoi.

Have done with the laurels that Fame may share,
Like youth they are fled too soon ;
O, it's hey and away from the house of Care,
And it's ho for the hills of June !

A GARDEN ROMANCE.

A DEWDROP lay on a leafy spray
In the rosy morn of a summer's day.

And the wee coquette with a shy glance met
The flashing eye of the Day God, set

In the heavens old like an orb of gold
Whose beaming burnished the blossomed wold.

He, wise old beau, for an hour or so
Bethought to flirt with the wight below,

And the court he paid to the mist-born maid
The robins watched from the scented shade.

How the sun would smile at the dew the while
And her thoughts from earth to the skies beguile!

How the dew would blink at the sun and wink
And change from opal and pearl to pink!

Till a moss-rose cried, near the dewdrop's side:
"False one, thou hadst promised to be my bride!"

A GARDEN ROMANCE.

But the rose must sigh with no dewdrop nigh,
And droop and wither and fade and die!"

When the dewdrop heard, quick her slight form
stirred,
And she sprang to his heart like a frightened bird!

And when Ladye Grace in ye robe of lace
Came tripping down through the fragrant ways,

She found—it is said—in the garden bed
A red, red rose and a dewdrop wed!

THE GOAL.

WHEN blue-eyed Morn fares forth on fairy feet
From out the envermeiled east,
And chaste-lipped blossoms lift confession sweet
To the great sun, their priest ;
While the deep world-heart throbs with waking bliss
And wild birds sing, and singing, soar the blue—
Ever my songs upon the day's first kiss
Go speeding, love, to you !

Or when, betimes, in gilded halls of noon
The day sits throned in state
While amorous winds to fragrant fields of June
Breathe vows inviolate ;
When the slow hours in languid currents glide
Like soundless streams with sungleams thriddled
through—
Then all my dreams upon the drowsy tide
Go drifting, dear, to you !

And when Eve stands upon the blue day's brim
Where Night's dim courtiers bow,
Thronging with dream-shod feet to diadem
With stars her dusky brow ;

THE GOAL.

When from the heavens fades the last faint flush
And distant tinklings drown in seas of dew—
My thoughts go winging through the scented hush
Always, my sweet, to you!

Always to you, for you, incarnate, hold
Morn's virgin charms, and weave
With all the Moontide's regal heart of gold
The tawny tints of Eve;
Always to you! In Daytime's transient gleam
Or when Night stalks with somber retinue
The goal and theme of all my song and dream
Shall ever, dear, be you!

AT A MOCKBIRD MATINEE.

EVER spend an afternoon
Of a day in jocund June
At a mockbird matinee?
Never? Honest? Well-a-day!
Where've you lived at, anyway?
Not a quicker cure for care
Manufactured anywhere;
Not a better balm for blues;
Not a dull soul but will lose
All its sluggishness, I say,
At a mockbird matinee!
Not a hint of trade or town
In the path one loiters down;
Not a thought of shops or desks
Where the sun weaves arabesques,
Fragile-fair and fairy-hued,
In the wood's deep solitude;
Not a thing but God's pure air,
Shine and shadow everywhere!
Pick yourself a mossy seat
In some dim and cool retreat,
And with sighs of deep content

AT A MOCKBIRD MATINEE.

Settle down all indolent
With your head against the trunk
Of some hoary forest monk ;
Bare your forehead while the breeze
Plies its gentle ministries ;
Close your eyes in rapture deep,
Feel yourself grow sleepy—sleep—

Then a-sudden—hist ! a stir
From some hidden chorister,
As along a branching spray
Where the sunbeams splash and play
Fares he forth in modest coat,
Flinging from his throbbing throat
Clear cascades of tinkling song,
Silver-sweet and subtle-strong ;
Strains of soul-compelling sound,
Streams of symphony unbound,
Lures of lyric riotry,
Miracles of melody,
Soft at times, and sweet and low,
As the slow and measured flow
Of some placid river tide
Down through meadows lush and wide ;
Or from breast aflame, afire,
Wild with passion, hot desire,

AT A MOCKBIRD MATINEE.

High and high and high and higher
Leap the frantic notes until
Fen and forest, haunt and hill,
Pulse and pant and throb and thrill,
Overawed and overcome
By the keen delirium!

Then as if such riotings
Had consumed symphonic springs,
For a solemn space, a hush!
But once more a rhythmic gush
Flashing downward fleet and free,
Mad with mirthful minstrelsy;
Ravishing the raptured ear
With a cadence crystal-clear
As the lisp of limpid rain
In autumnal fields of grain;
Stilling spirit strife and stress
With a rune of restfulness;
Purging blood and breast and brain
Of their poignant pangs of pain;
Rousing noble aims and true
In the slumbrous soul of you!

Ah! a man can drive away
Care and sorrow any day
At a mockbird matinee!

TO A BLASTED PINE.

STOUT yeoman of the wood! Plebeian pine!
Good honest friend of mine,
In cordial fellowship I lift my hand
To meet your rugged clasp.

I do not ask what scurvy trick of wind,
What weight of storm or spite of summer suns,
What sustenance of mother soil denied,
Made thee low-statured, stunted, dwarfed of mien,
Whilst thy patrician brother rears his head
High o'er his fellows, lordliest of the wood,
And flaunts his princely purple in the sun!

Nor do I care to know
That thou canst boast as proud a sire as he—
Some honored patriarch of the ancient wood,
Whose sturdy sap
Courses through every fiber of thy frame—
For in the sight
Of that clear-seeing and impartial Eye
Which measures all things under sky or roof,

TO A BLASTED PINE.

Trees and their little earthborn cousins, men,
By service, not by stature, thou art thrice
More tall than thy patrician brother pine
Who flaunts his princely purple in the sun!

For thou, near earth, dost spread a denser shade
Where weary pilgrims and sun-stricken kine
May rest them from the burning heat of noon:
And, bent to bear the brunt of wintry blasts,
Dost grant a safer shelter to the birds,
The little shivering orphans of the air;
Dost hold as much of healing in thy heart,
And fling as fair a fruitage on the sward!

Would I might claim within my narrow sphere
Of daily usefulness a service rare
As thou in thine, stout yeoman of the wood,
Plebeian pine! Good honest friend of mine!

THE THUNDERSTORM.

LIKE hostile armies massing for the fray,
Somber and dark, the westering storm clouds swarm
And line on line in threatening array.
Low-muttering, their grim battalions form.
Then, like to wrath-dumb furies, black and still,
They crouch one death-tense space with bated breath
And hurl them headlong from their highmost hill
To grapple in the fearful lists of death!
Hark! how their hoarse artillery rends the air
With peal on peal and deafening crash on crash!
Hark! how their shrill-lipped battle trumpets blare!
Look! where their sheathless lightning-sabers flash!
Then faint, then fierce, and fiercer yet again—
Listen! a sweeping enfilade of rain!

A CROSSROADS SCHOOLHOUSE.

Two country roadways writhe and wind
Like lizards lithe and lazy
Down shaly hillsides, purple-pined,
And clearings dim and hazy,
Past shallow fords where brooks that run
Through shoals of painted pebbles
Blur robin songs with antiphon
Of tuneful trills and trebles,
Till deep within the woodland's dusk,
As if to shun detection,
They join and pass with meeting brusque
To form an intersection.

There, stained by storm and Summer's frown
And warped by Winter's fingers,
Dingy and dark and bare and brown,
A country schoolhouse lingers,
Just as it did when, days ago,
Through shiny, steel-rimmed glasses,
Professor Biglow beamed upon
The crossroads lads and lasses,
Who dulled the sweets of simple lives
Above their blue-backed "spellers,"
Droning like bees in orchard hives
When June the apple mellows.

A CROSSROADS SCHOOLHOUSE.

These aisles which now no note disturbs
Once rang with struggling stammers
Of youth and maid o'er nouns and verbs
Of Smith's and Butler's grammars,
Or haply caught the teacher's zest
Of sudden satisfaction
When some apt pupil led the rest
And multiplied a fraction;
And oft on Fridays heard the calls
For essay, song, and story,
While loud-lunged bumpkins stormed the walls
With rustic oratory.

Or caught, perchance, an exchange fleet
Of glances laughter-laden
When book or flower from seat to seat
Passed to some anxious maiden.
At times, along the drowsy ranks,
There swept a chorused giggle
When some bold youngster, caught at pranks,
Would squirm and writhe and wriggle
Within the master's brawny grasp,
The while with footsteps jogging
He circled round with groan and gasp
Beneath a storm of flogging.

A CROSSROADS SCHOOLHOUSE.

Ah, me! more fleet than rose leaves blown
The years fly fast and faster!
Full many a spring have daisies grown
Above the kind old master;
While we, who, struggling, strove to learn
Beneath his admonition,
Have long since grappled lessons stern
Of Life's severe tuition;
And some have caused strong hearts to thrill
With eloquence and beauty,
While some, unknown, are greater still
Through simple lives of duty.

And Time on many a joyous brow
Has set his seal of sadness;
And many a heart is careworn now
That once brimmed full of gladness;
Yet, stained by storm and Summer's frown
And warped by Winter's fingers,
Dingy and dark and bare and brown,
A country schoolhouse lingers
Just as it did when, days ago,
Through shiny, steel-rimmed glasses,
Professor Biglow beamed upon
The crossroads lads and lasses.

THE HUSH AT HARVEST.

How speaking seems this hush on wood and field!
As if the year, all suddenly grown mute
Before such opulence of harvest yield,
Gold-glinting sheaves, and orchards bowed with
fruit,

Had bared his head, and for a moment's space,
From deeps of soul surcharged with gratitude,
Upbreathed a prayer of thankfulness and praise
Unto the Giver of all grace and good!

THE WOOD GYPSY.

IN scarlet skirt and bodice gay,
A bold-lipped, tawny thing,
Comes brown October down the wood,
A gypsy wandering.

Her light limbs shame the leopard's lithe
Abandonment of grace,
Her dark eyes prison all the old
Wild passion of her race.

Crooning, she lifts her voice in song,
Some strain of weird romance,
And, timed to clashing tambour bells,
Whirls in a wanton dance.

And ere the cadence dies away
In echoes wild and sweet,
The oaks and maples shower gold
About her twinkling feet!

A HEALTH TO OCTOBER

HERE'S a health to October, dream-sandaled October,
Queen of the quiet lands, dusk-eyed and sober—
Long be the reign of her, gladsome and good!

 The fay folk have kept her
 A golden-rod scepter,
Have raised her a shrine in a still solitude,
Where crisp, crinkled dead leaves, gold-dappled and
red leaves,

 Mellowly,
 Yellowly,
Flame in the wood!

Long stilled is the singing, the silvery singing
Of brooks that down June-lands tripped blithely, out-
flinging

Notes soft as the chimes of a clear-cadenced bell:

 The quail's shrill insistence
 Has died in the distance;
Sabbatical silence wraps all in its spell,
Save when through the hushes some brown-throated
thrush's

 Lyrical
 Miracle
Drifts from the dell.

A HEALTH TO OCTOBER.

Each dawning of day grants a boon of wild fragrance,
Borne in by light-hearted, light-footed wind-vagrants
From haunts where the sumac and wood-aster gleam :

 The morning light lusters
 The pendant grape clusters,
Empurpling the glens by the dim-shadowed stream ;
Its light kisses strike some to soft shining, like some
 Shimmery
 Memory
Burning in dreams.

So, a health to October, dream-sandaled October,
Queen of the quiet lands, dusk-eyed and sober,
Long be the reign of her, gladsome and good,

 And dark days not seek her !

 Up, up with a beaker !

A health to October—I pledge her again !

A beaker of darkling, light-beaded and sparkling

 Muscadine

 Dusky wine—

Bright to her reign !

AND ONE HAD LOVE.

AND ONE HAD LOVE.

ONE man had riches for his gift, and knew
The emptiness thereof;
Another, where Fame's topmost summits lift
All pigmy peaks above,
Felt the keen pangs of lofty loneliness;
And one had love!

Down in the lowly valley paths of life
His years were spent
Where, far removed from moiling din and strife,
Brook-song and bird-song blent
Babbled of quiet things, of restful peace
And deep content.

Yet there was something in his cup of days
Ineffably more sweet
Than e'er he knew who in the giddy maze
Of fortune set his feet
Or quaffed Fame's goblet, wreathed with rue and bays,
And found it incomplete!

LOVE'S HOUR.

THIS is love's hour, sweetheart—mine and yours!—

 This fleeting hour the dreamer's soul deems best
Of deepening dusk-time, when the sunset pours

 A warm cascade of color down the west,
And tinkling strains of twilight troubadours
 Float from the poplar's crest.

THIS is love's hour, sweetheart—gracious gift!

 When, hand in hand, alone, 'tis ours to go
Down purpling paths where white-lipped roses lift

 Their light-blown kisses in the starry glow,
And o'er the sward the locust blossoms drift
 As soundlessly as snow!

THE clashings keen, the clamors that infest

 The noon-wrapped city and its clanging mart,
Subdued to silence all, have sunk to rest;

 No sounds discordant from the marshes start;
This is the hour the dreamer's soul deems best—
 This is love's hour, sweetheart!

MEMORIAL DAY.

FAR in the gloom-wrapt wilderness,
Where crooning pine trees wave,
The wild winds wail a requiem
Above a soldier's grave ;
No gleaming shaft uprears its head
To mark the nameless tomb,
No comrades come with martial tread
To deck the spot with bloom.

Yet ever when the fields are clothed
In richest hues of May,
One woman holds within her heart
A lone Memorial Day :
And on that distant, unmarked grave
In somber shadows set,
She lays a wreath of fadeless love
And garlands of regret.

BLOSSOMS OF MAY.

BLOSSOMS of May at your feet, my sweet,
Dew-dappled blossoms of May;
Would that the lips of them, sweet, might repeat
All I am yearning to say!
Yearning to say of a heart that is true,
True unto you as the dawn to the dew;
Ah, could they whisper Love's secret to you,
Then might I treasure them aye and for aye,
Redolent, meadow-lent blossoms of May!

Blossoms of May at your feet, my sweet,
Wind-rumpled blossoms of May;
Look how I pluck them and lift them to meet
Smiles that are sunny as day!
Take them for pledge of a heart that is true,
True unto you as the dawn to the dew.
Sweet, let them whisper my secret to you,
These were Love's messengers ever and aye,
Dutiful, beautiful blossoms of May!

CASTLE AND CABIN.

I.

A MELLOWED light through stained-glass windows falls
On marble stairways and on stately halls,
With old rare portraits on the frescoed walls;
But silence reigns and sadness and a dearth
Of woman's laughter and of childish mirth.

When Love's a stranger, what's a palace worth?

II.

A low-roofed cabin and a rude-built floor,
Pink-petaled roses romping round the door,
And God's unfettered sunlight streaming o'er;
The happy housewife at her sewing sings,
The vine-clad porch with baby laughter rings.

With Love for guest, pray, who would sup with kings?

SONG OF A SUMMER'S DAY.

O, it's gold of the meadows and blue of the sky—
Was ever a June day rarer,
With a breath of the pines from the purple inclines
And the breeze for a balsam bearer?
O, it's gold of the meadows and blue of the sky—
Was ever a June day rarer?

O, it's gold of your tresses and blue of your eye.
Was ever a charm denied you?
And was ever a bliss that is equal to this
Out here in the fields beside you?
O, it's gold of your tresses and blue of your eye.
Was ever a charm denied you?

CARITA.

Do you ever dream, Carita, of a twilight long ago,
When the stars rained silver splendor from the skies
of Mexico?

When the moonbeams on the plaza traced a shimmer-
ing brocade,
And the fountain's tinkling tumult seemed a rippling
serenade?

When the velvet-petaled pansies, lifting light lips in
the gloom,
Breathed their yearning for the night-winds in a
passion of perfume?

When in soft cascades of cadence from a garden dim
and far
Came the mournful mellow music of a murmurous
guitar?

Years have flown since then, Carita, fleet as orchard
blooms in May,
But the hour that fills my dreaming—was it only
yesterday?

CARITA.

Stood we two a space in silence while the southern sun
slipped down,
And the gray dove, Dusk, with brooding pinions wrapt
the little town.

Then you raised your tender glances, darkly, dreamily
to mine,
And my pulses clashed like cymbals in a rhapsody
divine,

And the pent-up fires of longing burst their prison's
weak control,
And in wild hot words came leaping madly from my
burning soul;

Wild hot words that told of passion hitherto but half-
expressed;
And I caught you close, Carita, clasped you, strained
you, to my breast.

While the twilight-purpled heavens reeled around us
as we stood,
And a tide of bliss swept surging through the currents
of our blood!

CARITA.

And I spent my soul in kisses, crushed upon your scar-
let mouth!

O Carita! Señorita! Dusk-eyed daughter of the
South!

It was well that Fate should part us; it was well my
path should lead

Back to slopes of high endeavor—nay, and was it well,
indeed?

You were of a tropic people, steeped in roses and ro-
mance,

Lovers of the gay fiesta, music, and the mazy dance!

I was from a northern country, scion of that colder
race

Who have missed the most of living in their foolish
phantom-chase!

You have wed some swarthy Southron; long have
learned his every whim,

Rolled cigarros, poured the mescal, sung the Southern
songs for him;

I have fought my fight and triumphed; all the world
repeats my name;

But I prize one hour of loving more than fifty years
of fame!

CARITA.

It was but a summer madness that possessed me, men
will hold,
That the mellow moon bewitched me with its wizardry
of gold.

As they will! But oft, when wearied of the world, I
close my eyes,
And in dreams drift back where stars rain silver splen-
dor from the skies,

And I clasp you close. Carita, while each vibrant pulse
is thrilled
With a low and mournful cadence that shall nevermore
be stilled.

THE CONQUEROR.

ONE built about his heart a mighty wall,
Thick-moated, bastioned, ample-based, and tall.

And laughed secure at Love's first bugle-blast ;
Scoffed at the next ; but at the third and last

The thick wall trembled, crumbled, crashed, and fell ;
Love leaped the breach and stormed the citadel !

ONE GOLDEN DAY.

DEEP in her casket of old treasured things
September hoards for us one golden day!
Ah me! how joy made murmurous the way
And young Love lured us on with shining wings!

A day to dream of! What if dreaming brings
No shimmer of lost other days? For aye
Deep in her casket of old treasured things
September hoards for us one golden day!

What though the swarming years with waspish stings
Have brought us smarting sorrows? Though astray
Youth's rosy feet forsook our wanderings?
Not all is lost, for smiling, we can say:
"Deep in her casket of old treasured things
September hoards for us one golden day!"

WHERE LOVE HOLDS SWAY.

'Tis always summer where Love holds sway,
Though skies be glooming and clouds hang gray;
 For a glint of June
 Lights a wintry noon
If Love be lord in the heart, I say!

'Tis always summer where Love holds sway
Though sad rains croon down the desolate day;
 Though a wild wind shrills
 Through the haunted hills
December harbors a glimpse of May!

'Tis always summer where Love holds sway,
Glad hearts heed not what the wind-lips say,
 For if Love be king
 They are like to sing
With a rollicking lilt in the roundelay!

BUENAS NOCHES, SEÑORITA.

SLOWLY from the southern sky
All the silver stars are fading ;
Tremulously drift and die
Sounds of distant serenading ;
Yearning moon and sighing sea,
Breast to breast, impassionedly,
Cling in close farewell ; ah me !
Moon and sea part : sweet, must we ?
Buenas noches, Señorita !

Wooing night-winds long have left
Pink-lipped petals spent with kisses :
Homing fireflies have reft
Oleander hearts of blisses :
Swiftly down the garden close,
Like a fragrant whisper, goes
White moth lover from his rose :
Rose-queen regnant ! Adios !
Buenas noches, Señorita !

TO A RED-HAIRED MAIDEN.

DECOROUS damsel! Pink of paragons!

I sing the glory of thy tawny tresses

Blown by a wild wind's wantoning caresses

About thy brow in arabesques of bronze!

Say, did the garish flame of wintry dawns

Stream on thy head from the sky's far recesses?

Didst filch thy fire from autumn wildernesses

Or ruddy splendor from envermeiled lawns?

I know but this: that it accentuates

Thy blue-veined temples' white transparency

And frames thy face—a lily, snowy fair;

But ah! that the inexorable Fates

In Freedom's noon should thus imprison me

And bind me captive with a strand of hair!

AN AUTUMN LURE.

A LURE from the lands of autumn
And a prospect rare unfolds
Of the dusky wine of the muscadine
And the maple's flaunting gold;
A lure from the lands of autumn,
And who could such lure withstand?
Through the keen, crisp air let us blithely fare—
Carissima, your hand!

For out where the sumacs beckon
With beacons that glimmer red,
And a murmurous music wakens
In the pine leaves overhead,
Comes a stir to the vibrant heart-strings
While the soul from its care leash slips,
And your eyes seek mine with a warmth divine—
Carissima, your lips!

AN OCTOBER SONG.

WHEN October flings her banners
Over all the russet hills
And the thrush-choirs lift hosannas
In a thousand tuneful trills,
When the summer-haunted heather
Swims in mellow, yellow haze,
Let us wander, love, together
Through the golden autumn ways!

Let us take the paths that bring us
Where the sunlight gilds the sod,
And the bandit breezes fling us
Fragrances of golden-rod;
Let us breathe the old, sweet story
Where the sumac shimmers red
And the maple leaves, in glory
Flaming, flutter overhead.

Let us pray when Life's October
Comes to dim the summer flowers,
Waking thoughts half bright, half sober,
Deep within this soul of ours,
That it brings Hope's sun, dispersing
Cares that may encloud the land,
That it find us, love, traversing
Sunset meadows, hand in hand!

A ROSE OF YESTERDAY.

WITHIN a book of Browning's, where he weaves
Symphonic sunshine for our winter's gray,
I found, close-pressed between the songful leaves,
A rose of yesterday.

Time's thievish touch has robbed it of its scent,
No mid-year luster lingers in its leaves;
And yet to me 'tis richly redolent
Of bygone summer eves.

The moonlit glammers of a night in June
Stream, as I dream, about me mellowly,
The lisp of leaves, the cricket's low bassoon,
Waken again for me.

Just for one fleeting space I catch the gleam
Of soulful glances, surf of billowy lace,
Of locks, cascading down an auric stream,
About a flowerlike face.

A flowerlike face, a lily glorified
With Love's impassioned pureness, strangely sweet;
And once again my soul, a pulsing tide,
Lies, throbbing, at her feet.

A ROSE OF YESTERDAY.

Trembling, from off her bosom's heaving snows,
She plucks one rosebud, wet with twilight dew ;
"Know, love"—to me—"that with this summer rose
I give my heart to you!"

.....
Ah, me! ah, me! that all Youth's golden charms
Are for one joyous June decreed to last!
That I should reach outstretched, imploring arms
To a relentless past!

Gone with their blossoms are the days that were,
About me falls December's gloom and gray ;
And in my hand one lone remembrancer,
A rose of yesterday.

A LOVER'S QUESTION.

You plucked a purple pansy from its bed
And pressed its perfumed petals to your lips.
And then with rosy, ruthless finger tips
You tore it into fragments, shred by shred,
And flung it from you, odorless and dead.

Pray, if Love's flower were yours to pluck, perchance,
Would you uplift it for a space and press
Its petals to your lips in brief caress,
Then fling it down in sudden petulance
As if no longer worthy of your glance?

A DREAM IN THE DUSK.

OFTTIMES, outworn with warring in this strife
That men call Life,

This hotly raging fever of unrest
At battle in my breast,

When the keen clash of day, its clamors rude,
Sink, half subdued,

Dulled to a low and muffled monotone,
I dream alone

While Twilight's fingers shatter one by one
The roses of the sun,

And lightly over purpling copse and hill
The fading petals spill ;

And truant thought on Hermes' sandals speeds
As Memory leads

Where snowy dogwoods star the dusky shades
Of tranquil glades,

A DREAM IN THE DUSK.

And shy, brown-dimpled meadow brooks trip fleet
On silver feet,

Past league on sunny league—till Fancy sees,
Shut in with trees,

Green-girdled by a dim-aisled garden place
Whose shadows race

Where slim crape myrtles strew the sward below
With blossomed snow,

And brown bees balance on light lily stalks
Beside the walks,

A quiet Southern country seat, that stands
As if with hands

Outstretching welcome to each wayworn guest.
Bidding him pause and rest.

All things about the place bespeak repose,
Broad porticoes,

White, ample wings, wide hallways, cool and clean,
And shutters green.

A DREAM IN THE DUSK.

The dawnlight smites the roof-tree as of old
With shafts of gold ;

At noon from beds of sweet, old-fashioned pinks
The cricket clinks ;

The far, faint flutings of the mocking bird
At dusk are heard,

When through the gloom each swaying jasmine seems
A star in dreams.

Twined to the trellis honeysuckles swing,
And coil and cling,

Flinging thick shadows on the hall below,
Where long ago,

Within a quaint-carved armchair, used to sit,
And rock and knit,

A wee old woman with soft locks of snow
And smiles, I know,

Such as the saints must wear in Paradise ;
Her gentle eyes

A DREAM IN THE DUSK.

Beaming fond blessings on the urchins gay,
Who romped at play

Down the dim pathways of the gardenside,
All happy-eyed,

Routing with upraised hands and sudden cries
The dappled butterflies :

Seeking the swallow's fragile house of leaves
Beneath the eaves :

Chasing the lizard to his cell of stone,
Mocking the bumble's drone :

Finding fresh pastime for each restless mood
Of youngsterhood.

.
Would God that feet, grown older now, might press
Those paths of pleasantness

That once they knew ere, truantly, they turned
Worldward and learned

How lying are the luring lips that call,
How poor and small

A DREAM IN THE DUSK.

The little laurels that Life's battlefield
At last may yield!

Would God that ears, sore-sickened of the blare
And tumult, where,

'Neath clacking wheels of Commerce, whirring round,
Men's souls are ground

To golden powder for the price of bread;
Where Truth seems dead,

Sincerity a shadow, simple Faith
A formless wraith—

Might catch the changing cadence of the pines
On far inclines,

The quail's shrill pipe at dawn; might list again
The croon of rain

In autumn twilights, and the rhythmic beat
Of tinkling sleet

Clink on the pane, while up the chimney wide
A ruddy tide

A DREAM IN THE DUSK.

Of flame sweeps surging, and each pulse is thrilled
At sound of voices stilled!

Would God that eyes, which latterly have known
But streets of stone,

Might glimpse the quiet beauty of some wood's
Deep solitudes,

The changing hues of summer dusks and dawns :
Star-lighted lawns :

Mad miracles of color springtime throws
Athwart an orchard close!

That sordid souls, forgetting place or pelf,
Stripped bare of self,

In Heaven's all-cleansing sunlight purged again
Of smirch and stain,

Might claim the wholesome candor and the truth
They knew in youth!

TEXAS.

TEXAS.

THIS is no stripling, sirs, no yokel youth,
This bronze-limbed Hercules of giant girth ;
This is the stoutest-thewed, the stanchest-souled
In all the brawny brotherhood of States !

Time was, perchance, when, indolent, outstretched,
Sprawled like a lazy urchin at his ease,
He dozed and dreamed the drowsy hours away
Beside the shallows of some singing stream,
Or else, uplinking at a Southern sun,
Watched while a snowy squadronry of cloud
Waged mimic Trafalgars on skyey seas.
His was the fragrance of the fallow field,
The burst of bird-song and the ample air,
Purple expanses of primeval pine,
And undulant wide reaches of the plain.
But, with the lapse of adolescent years,
Through his slow pulses swept a sudden thrill,
The quick, keen impulse of an ichor new
That stirred his slumbrous soul to stinging life :
And swift off-flinging from his lithesome limbs
Inaction's shackles and the gyves of ease,

TEXAS.

Up to the stalwart stature of a man
Leaped he, erect, and Godlike in his mien,
And looking worldward with a questing eye
Saw where his kindred commonwealths had swept
Far past him on the stretching slopes until
Dim showed their outlines on the upper steeps!

Thrilled by the thunders of their Titan tread,
Stung with a sense of sluggish slothfulness,
Waked to the wanton wastefulness of years,
He turned his back to ease and dull content
And, upward faring, set his steadfast step
Straight toward the peaks of high emprise, nor breathed
A half-regret for deedless days forsworn;
Nor paused he in his pilgrimage until
High on a proud plateau of aims fulfilled
For a brief breathing-space he stood and swept
World-ways with gaze far-reaching in its scope;
Saw the dusk pine lands, that were wont to lie
Flecked with the saffron sheen of summer suns
And flinging lures of balsam to the breeze,
Freighting the creaking cars and groaning ships
With the upyielding of eon's growth;
Looked on the prairies, girt with golden sheaves,
Where full-flanked cattle stalked in sleek content;
Saw the old haunts, which erst were overgrown

TEXAS.

With brier and bramble and where roamed at will
All countless crawling creatures of the wild,
Ribbioned with streets of stretching steel that led
To city steeples signaling the skies ;
Heard the low croon of commerce and the hum
Of whirring engines and the lisp of looms,
Panting of pistons and the strenuous stir
Of keels, outveering from the harborsides !

Then with fixed purpose and a large resolve
Upward again and upward turned his tread
Forward and starward to the highmost peaks !

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